DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 281 CS 001 567

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TITLE Reading Test Review: The Darrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 11p.; Study done in the Academic Foundation Dept., Rutgers University

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Reading; *Reading Diagnosis; Reading Processes; *Reading Skills; *Reading Tests
IDENTIFIERS *Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the The Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty test. A brief overview of the test discusses the physical format and the procedures for administering it. Norms, reliability, and validity are discussed for the subtests: Oral Reading, Silent Reading, Word Recognition and Word Analysis, Visual Memory of Word Forms, Spelling, and Handwriting. Also presented is a general evaluation which reviews some of the shortcomings of the test and briefly discusses some of the test's strong points. (WR)

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READING TEST REVIEW

THE DURRELL ANALYSIS OF READING DIFFICULTY*

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*Donald D. Durrell; Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955.

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Overview

The Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty is an individually administered test for students in grades one through six. Required testing time ranges from 30 to 90 minutes. The emphasis of the battery of tests is on: silent and oral reading; listening comprehension; word analysis; phonetics; pronunciation; writing; and spelling. The Analysis allows for "situations in which the examiner may observe in detail various aspects of a child's reading" (Durrell, 1955). A major purpose of the Analysis is to uncover weaknesses and faulty habits in reading which lend themselves to a remedial program. One of the major strengths and features of this test is the inclusion of checklists for the purpose of recording observation of difficulties.

The testing materials consist of a reusable spiralbound booklet of "Reading Paragraphs," a reusable hand tachistoscope and cards, the "Examiner's Manual," and five "Record Booklets."

The Analysis is comprised first of the "Oral Reading" section, which conisists of eight paragraphs with questions to measure comprehension. The comprehension is measured, however, only by recall of details; there are no questions to measure the student's critical reading which stands as a criticism of the test. The checklists of the oral reading section covers four phases of phrase reading, six characteristics of word skills, eleven characteristics of voice, enunciation and expression, and eight characteristics

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of general reading habits. Norms are included for grades one through six on the levels of low, medium and high. The norms, however, "are based upon speed of reading alone; there are not norms for level of comprehension..." (Maxwell, 1959).

Paragraphs correspond to grade level, and the author suggests that testing begin at the child's actual reading level and that at least three paragraphs be read. Spache (1959), however, states that because there is only one paragraph at each reading level, "it is impossible to follow these directions and secure an adequate sample with individuals reading below the third garde level. Thus, it we assume that the reading selections represent specific grade levels, which is doubtful, the test will function adequately only as a measure of the simplest type of oral reading above primary levels." This writer suggests that testing begin at two years below the actual grade level.

The child reads successive paragraphs until seven or more errors are made on a single paragraph or until the students exceeds the required reading time by more than two minutes. The attained score is based upon the time it took the student to read each paragraph, the number of comprehension questions answered correctly (two or more questions answered incorrectly is indicative of poor comprehension or low attention in oral reading), and the oral reading errors which include: omitted words or word parts; mispronunciation of words; repetitions; words pronounced for the examinee; insertion of words or syllables; omission

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of punctuation; and hesitancy.

The second part of the test battery is the "Silent Reading Tests" which also consist of eight paragraphs which correspond in difficulty to the oral reading paragraphs. The checklist for this section provides for seven items in mechanics of silent reading, seven characteristics of recall, three items for eye movement, and three levels for a comparison with oral reading. There are no questions which involve any type of comprehension; however, imagery questions are included. Norms are included for silent reading level.

According to Spache (1959), the primary purpose of this test is to obtain a direct comparison of oral and silent reading abilities because the student reads paragraphs and answers questions which are comparable to those on the "Oral Reading Test." "As in the Oral Reading Test, the examiner cannot secure an adequate sample for individuals reading below third grade level" (Spache, 1959). Because many students have the ability to recall the details of these paragraphs without actual comprehension, the adequacy of the test as a measure of silent reading is dubious, as is the comparability with the Oral Reading Test (Spache, 1959).

The third subtest is the "Listening Comprehension Tests" which contain seven paragraphs (one for each grade level) and comprehension questions. The segment is deemed "praisworthy" by Maxwell (1959) as it is not always included in diagnostic reading tests. Spache (1959), however, states that the "Listening Comprehension" is really an adaptation

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of the Oral Reading Test, and that each reading selection in the listening segment is actually one grade level below each oral reading paragraph and includes a group of recall questions.

The examiner is to begin with the paragraph that corresponds to the student's grade level or chronological age. The child should be able to answer all questions on the paragraph for his grade level. The listening comprehension score is estimated as being on the level at which not more than one question is missed. Spache (1959) feels that this "arbitrarily scaled test is intended to function as a measure of potential for reading comprehension."

Eight supplemtary paragraphs are included which are comparable in difficulty to the silent and oral reading paragraphs. These paragraphs may be used for supplementary testing, retesting, written recall, or for checking speed of handwriting from copy.

The fourth subtest is "Word Recognition and Word Analysis" and is used to measure immediate word recognition and delayed word analysis. This segment consists of a manual tachistoscope, two lists, one for grade one and a second for grades two through six. Separate norms are provided and a checklist which includes five word recognition skills (for flashed words) and fourteen itmes for word analysis.

The list is presented to the student based upon his grade level. The test is completed when seven consecutive incorrect responses are obtained or when the entire card

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is completed. The "Word Recognition Test" is praised (Spache, 1959) as the "most original and functional test in the battery, provided the examiner can manipulate it properly." It is felt that, through this test, the student's visual recognition of words is adequately tested, but there are no provisions by which the student's methods of word attack can be analyzed (Maxwell, 1959).

The following test is "Visual Memory of Word Forms" which consists of identification tests for primary grades, and writing from memory for intermediate grades. Norms are included for both. Also included are checklists for three characteristics.

"Naming letters-Identifying Letters Names-Matching Letters" is another test which is designed primarily for the nonreader; however, it may be used with any child who is suspected not to know the names of the letters. Another test is "Hearing Sounds in Words" which is geared for any child whose reading level is grade three or below. This test requires the child to indicate words which have the same beginning, final, or beginning and final sound as the words pronounced. The following test is the "Sounds of Letters" which is for those who are reading on second grade level or below. These tests may be useful measures of phonic skills.

A "Learning Rate" test is also included and is designed for the nonreader of the preprimer reader. The purpose is to discover the degree of difficulty the child has in remem-

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phonic words taught. This test attempts to measure the child's ability to learn isolated words by an abbreviated method. This test does not measure norms, and with this absence and "the ignoring of the influence of the child's intellectual level, and the use of an inadequate number of words to challenge children of higher capacities, all tend to make these tests of little practical value in its present form" (Spache, 1959).

The final two tests are supplementary test of "Spelling" and "Handwriting." Two spelling lists are provided, one for primary grades and the second for intermediate grades. A checklist of difficulties in spelling consisting of four characteristics is provided as are norms. Spelling errors are to be noted and combined with those from oral reading. As Spache (1959) notes, "these errors are not carefully defined or described, nor are all significant types noted." The "Handwriting Test" is administered by having the child copy a paragraph he read orally for one minute if he is in grade two or above. If the child is in grade one, he is asked to write a few words if he can or copy letters from the paragraphs. A checklist is provided which includes four characteristics of handwriting difficulty and grade norms are provided based on letters written per minute.

Norms-Reliability-Validity

Norms are included for the following subtests of the Analysis: Oral Reading (based upon speed of reading); Silent Reading (based upon speed of reading); Word Recog-

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nition and Word Analysis; Visual Memory of Word Forms; Spelling; and Handwriting.

The basis upon which these tests were standardized and size and nature of the population is not stated. It is stated, however, that "wherever norm tables are presented, the norms are based on no fewer than a thousand children for each test" (Durrell, [illegible]). Also, there is no information presented regarding reliability and validity of any of the tests. It is believed that it is the author's contention that statistics of reliability and validity are not necessary because the reading process per se is being tested.

General Evaluation

In general, the Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty offers a relatively adequate battery of tests to observe and assess reading habits and related skills.

There are shortcomings to the test. For the "Oral Reading Test" and "Silent Reading Test" it is not possible to obtain an accurate score for students reading below grade level three. A second criticism is that the comprehension questions do not measure critical reading, but rather recall of details. There are no norms to measure the student's level of comprehension; norms are based on speed of reading.

The "Listening" subtest has been both acclaimed and questioned (Maxwell, 1959 and Spache, 1959). The other major subtests, "Words and Letter Recognition" are adequate

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not they do not present methods to analyze the student's method of words attack. The complementary test of "Spelling" does not completely state what the errors are that are to be combined with those for oral reading.

A final criticism of the Analysis is that norms are interspersed on various pages (Schreiber, 1973).

In brief, the Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty is designed primarily for observing faulty habits and weaknesses in reading which are pertinent to planning a remedial program. The author states that the checklists of difficulties are the most important features of the test, and that they "are more important than the norms" (Durrell, 1955). The checklists are detailed and appear to be complete. The instructions in the manual are clear, and they provide fairly adequate directions for easy administration.

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